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Arabic-Polish Language Contacts – an Overview

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is the attempt to point one of the most important aspects of the cultural contact of the Poland and Arabic countries with the consideration of the historical perspective. The author assumes that the language is the basic carrier of such contacts and also the main area of the mutual influences. Therefore, she discusses the Arabic and Polish relations mostly on the level of the translation of the literary and scientific output of both sides, as well as the linguistic interference mainly in the aspect of the lexical borrowings. The author quotes many examples of such linguistic contacts and underlines their great meaning in the existence and development of other types of relations: political, commercial, and cultural.

Keywords

Arabic, Polish linguistic contact, translations, linguistic interference.

In 2011 a conference on mutual influence and confluence of Eastern and Western thought was organized by the Institute of Romance Studies of the Jagiellonian University. I had a pleasure of participating in it and delivering a paper on “The Areas of Mutual Influence of the East and the West in the Eyes of a Polish Arabist”¹ in which I briefly focused on an important claim, which now I would like to present more extensively. I believe that the most fundamental vehicle of mutual relationships between particular societies is language, which at the same time becomes the most important area of mutual influence. On the one hand, mutual contacts produce linguistic interferences, which result in various borrowings, mostly lexical, but – what is equally important – semantic,

¹ Górską, Elżbieta. 2012. Zones d’ influences réciproques de l’ Orient et de l’ Occident vues par une arabisante polonaise [in:] Katarzyna Dybel, Anna Klimkiewicz, Monika Świda (eds), *Pensées orientale et occidentale: influences et complémentarité*, 125–136. Kraków.

that is notional. On the other hand, the need to learn each other's societies and cultures makes it necessary to translate each other's literary or academic output, which, in turn, stimulates and inspires human thought in many practical and intellectual areas. The present paper – sketchy as it is – will nevertheless illustrate this assumption referring to the contacts between the Arabic language and the Polish one that from among all Slavic languages is best known to me. I will review two aspects of the contacts – a strictly linguistic one, where the mutual impact is illustrated by borrowings and a broader, linguistic, literary and a cultural one, where the impact is produced by translations.

Przemysław Turek, a professor of the Jagiellonian University, is a foremost expert on the first aspect. On the basis of his excellent book *Słownik zapożyczeń pochodzenia arabskiego w polszczyźnie* [= Dictionary of Arabic Borrowings in Polish, 2001] and some other publications, we are able to trace the two channels through which Arabic words would pass into the Polish language and the changes that took place during the process of their adaptation. The first, Western one was via Latin, German, Italian, French and Spanish, the languages in which they also struck their roots and remained thereafter, for instance the word *ġarrāfa* – “karafka” [= carafe] via Spanish and Italian,² *al-kuḥl* – “alkohol” [= alcohol] via Spanish and medieval Latin,³ *ʿanbar* – “ambra” [= ambergris] via medieval Latin and then French, Italian and Spanish,⁴ as well as many other words. The second, Eastern one is the effect of a historical, geographical proximity to the Ottoman empire and the Crimean Khanate, with which Poland shared borders in the 15th–18th centuries. However, the Poles would look to the East as early as the 12th century, when wealthy and influential magnates began organizing pilgrimages to Palestine, the home of many sacred places for the Christians, like, first of all, Jesus' tomb in Jerusalem. The first account of such a pilgrimage comes from 1604 (*Peregrynacja abo pielgrzymowanie do Ziemi Świętej* = Pilgrimage to the Holy Land) and was written by Count Mikołaj Radziwiłł, who in 1582–84 explored not only Palestine itself but also northern Syria and Egypt. He was the first to acquaint the Poles with the customs and traditions of the Arabs and with some precise statistics. Among other things he described the customs of the Druze, a section of Islam, which at the time was very little known in Europe. Thanks to this Eastern way, especially the Turkish language, the Polish one adopted many military words, such as, for instance, “jasyr” [= the captives], which derives from the Arabic *ʿasīr*,⁵ or every day words like “filizanka” [= coffee/tea cup], which derives from the Arabic *finġān*.⁶ An average speaker of Polish does not realize the origins of such words,

² Turek 2001: 245–246.

³ *Ibidem*, 117–118.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 124–125.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 229–230.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 198.

but an inquisitive reader and lover of Polish literature may recognize them as coming from Arabic and find them in the literary output of Polish classical authors. This is possible because at the turn of the 18th century the so called Orientalism, fashionable in Europe, made its way to Poland. The fashion was responsible for the introduction into literature of selected motifs related to the culture and customs of the East, which most Europeans considered exotic and arcane. In Poland Orientalism resulted in the introduction and subsequent partial adaptation of Arabic lexemes, which can be found in the poetic works of the two greatest Polish romantic poets, Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855): “Sonety krymskie” [= The Crimean Sonnets]; “Czatyrdah.Mirza” [= Chatyrdag Mirza]; “Bakczysaraj” [= Bakhchysarai]; his translation of Arabic qasida “Szanfary” [= Chanfary] and an attempt at his own qasida “Farys – kasyda na cześć emira Tadż al-Fachra ułożona” [= Fāris – Qasida Formed in Honor of Emir Taj al-Fahr] and Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849): “Duma o Wacławie Rzewuskim” [= Poem on Waclaw Rzewuski]; “Anhelli”; “Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu” [= A Voyage to the Holy Land from Naples]; “Ojciec zadżumionych” [= The Father of the Plague-stricken]. As it is evident both poets were inspired by the unusual figure of Wacław Rzewuski (1785–1831), a Polish Orientalist and explorer, an expert in Arabian horses, who, as the only European, received the title of emir in Egypt.⁷ Again, Orientalism became popular in the neoromantic period of the Young Poland in the works of such writers as Bolesław Leśmian (1877–1937) and Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska (1894–1945), as well as in the novels of Henryk Sienkiewicz (1845–1915): “W pustyni i puszcy” [= In Desert and Wilderness]. It is thanks to Sienkiewicz that many generations of young Poles, including, I believe, many Polish Orientalists, were for the first time exposed to the history and culture of Islam and, what follows quite naturally, to the Arabic vocabulary, which, to some extent, enriched the Polish language. I strongly encourage all young Arabists to get acquainted with these works and to search for more borrowings.⁸

What is interesting is that also in the case of modern Polish one can see the impact of the Arabic language. This was proved by Przemysław Turek in his two comprehensive articles that focus on the so called “contract language” of those Poles who in the 80s and 90s of the 20th century worked as contract specialists in Arabic countries.⁹ They evolved a specific Creole language that combined Polish with Arabic lexemes inflected according to the Polish declension rules, eg. “weż sajjarę i jedź na suk, nie mamy chobzy” [= Take the car and go to the

⁷ Bielawski 1971: 444–445.

⁸ More detailed information on the Arabic motives in the Polish literature in Dziekan 2008: 288–296.

⁹ Turek, Wacław Przemysław. 1992. „Język kontraktowy” Polaków przebywających w krajach arabskich [= “Contract language” of Poles working in Arabic countries], part I: *Przegląd Polonijny* XVIII, part I, vol. 2, 59–78, part II: *ibidem*, vol. 3, 19–31.

souq {= marketplace}, we have no chobza {= bread}] or being phonetically or phonologically distorted, eg. *džadża* instead of *dağāğa* [= chicken] or *zowza*, so popular among the Poles, instead of *zawğa* [= wife].¹⁰ What is obvious about the direct impact that has resulted in borrowings is that it is one-directional only – the Polish language has no influence on Arabic whatsoever. On the other hand, in the field of translations the situation is a little bit better, though even here the Polish interest in the Orient, exemplified by, among other things, academic research and translation is considerably higher than the other way round. The Arabic countries have always focused more on the countries of the West, those of the Mediterranean Basin and possibly on Russia.

The Europeans have always been interested in the Quran as the sacred book of Islam. As early as in the 17th century European diplomats residing in Muslim countries fanned interest in Europe in learning more about Islam that so far had been quite alien, if not downright hostile. Some of them translated the Quran themselves, just like André Ryer, a French consul in Cairo, in 1647.¹¹ But the apex of Quran translations into European languages, including the first translation into Polish (1858), traditionally called the “Buczacki translation” (but as a matter of fact translated by Ignacy Domeyko and Fr. Dionizy Chlewiński via the French translation of Savary).¹² However, the best and the only one, published from the original in Arabic in 1986, is that of Józef Bielawski, the late professor of Warsaw University. Polish translations of hadiths are valuable and interesting supplements to the Quran translation. The thoughts and pronouncements of the prophet Muhammad were translated and published in two separate editions by well-known Arabists from Warsaw University: Janusz Danecki, *Mądrości Proroka* [= Wisdom of the Prophet], 1993 and 2000, and Jolanta Kozłowska *O małżeństwie, kupcach i dobrym wychowaniu* [= On Marriage, Tradesmen and Good Manners], 1999.

Just like in the rest of Europe, the text of *One Thousand and One Nights* has always attracted much attention also in Poland. The first French translation of Antoine Galland of 1707 became the basis of many translations into European languages, including the first Polish translation by Sokołowski in 12 volumes published in 1767–69.¹³ Since the 18th century a few translations from various European languages have been published – some concerned the text in its entirety and some a few selected stories only (most often the stories of Sinbad the Sailor). The first Polish translation of selected stories from the Arabic original was published in 1959. It was prepared by Władysław Kubiak, a Warsaw Arabist, along with a well-known Polish poet Jerzy Ficowski, who turned a philological

¹⁰ “Zółza” (zowza) in Polish means a bad woman, a shrew.

¹¹ Bielawski 1986, Introduction: 819.

¹² Turek 2010: 399.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 396.

translation into a literary one and additionally translated poems that the text of *One Thousand and One Nights* contains. Additionally, a comprehensive introduction, commentaries and footnotes were provided by professor Tadeusz Lewicki, a famous Arabist from Kraków. The second translation of *One Thousand and One Nights* was produced just in Kraków. It was a joint effort of ten Arabists led by professor Lewicki, who wrote an introduction and commentaries. The effort resulted in ten richly illustrated volumes, which were published in 1974 and – the shortened version – in 1982. We need to bear in mind though that *One Thousand and One Nights* is nothing more than an fascinating narrative of an interesting literary quality and as such it meets a universal longing for exotic fairy tales and has very little to do with real history, culture and traditions of the Arab world. To find more reliable knowledge one should turn to authentic sources produced by medieval Arab scholars – this is exactly what was done by the founding fathers of the Polish and Kraków Oriental studies, professor Tadeusz Kowalski (1889–1948) and professor Tadeusz Lewicki (1906–1992), his student and son-in-law. Among other sources they studied those texts which tell about the beginnings of the Polish statehood and the history of Poland as well as that of neighboring countries.

The first mention of the state of Poland can be found in Ibrāhīm Ibn Yaʿqūb, an arabized Jew from Spain, who visited Poland in the middle of the 10th century and left an interesting account of the nascent duchy and the customs of the Slavic people. The account was reproduced by Al-Bakrī, an Arabic geographer of the 11th century and as such was published by Tadeusz Kowalski in 1946 along with a translation and a commentary under the title *Relacja Ibrāhīma Ibn Yaʿqūba z podróży do krajów słowiańskich* [= Ibrāhīm Ibn Yaʿqūb's Account of his Journey to Slavic Countries].

At the same time, in 1945, Tadeusz Lewicki brought out a book entitled *Polska i kraje sąsiednie w świetle „Księgi Rogera” geografą arabskiego z XII w. al-Idrīsī’ego* [= Poland and Neighboring Countries as Seen by Mohammed al-Idrīsī, an Arabic Geographer of the 12th century, in his Work “Tabula Rogeriana”]. It was a two-volume work, which had an immense impact on the research of historians and archeologists, who studied the history of Central and Eastern Europe. Other Arabic sources thanks to which professor Lewicki revealed new aspects of the history and culture of the Slavs, which were completely unknown before, were the works of such geographers and travelers as Ibn al-Faqīh, Al-Hamadānī (9th c.), Ibn Rustah, Abū Hāmid al-Andalusī, Ibn Faḍlān, Al-Masʿūdī and Ibn Ḥawqal (10th c.), Al-Qazwīnī (13th c.) and Al-Ḥimyarī (15th c.), which resulted in the next multi-volume work *Źródła arabskie do dziejów Słowiańszczyzny* [= Arabic Sources to the History of Slavic People] – vol. I: 1956, vols. II–IV: 1969. What is also worth mentioning is professor Lewicki's research into old trade routes connecting Arabic and European countries, trade interests, artifacts related to those interests and the treasures of Arabic coins

found in Poland and in the neighboring countries. His research is reflected in such publications as *La participation des pays musulmans au commerce avec les territoires polonais au IXe – Xe siècles à la lumière des trouvailles de monnaies coufiques en Pologne*, 1968; *Les sources arabes concernant l'ambre jaune de la Baltique*, 1984; *Les travaux polonais concernant les „trésors” de monnaies coufiques trouvés en Pologne et dans les pays voisins (1800–1968)*. All of these works are a major contribution to European, but mostly Polish and Slavonic archeology, and at the same time they testify to the enduring cultural contacts between Arabic and Slavonic countries.

The scholarly works of both professors Kowalski and Lewicki I mentioned above, as well as many other they published, triggered a wave of translations into Polish of original texts in Arabic, either serious ones, like philosophical and historical treatises, or belles-lettres, such as poetry and prose. In this respect the Polish Arabic studies, mostly carried out in Warsaw and in Kraków, have many outstanding achievements, which for obvious reasons I am unable to give a full justice to. Let me mention just a few old Arabic texts available in Polish in a chronological order.

- Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* (*Żyjący syn Czuwającego* [= The Living Son of the One who is Awaken], transl. Józef Bielawski, 1958);
- Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla* (*Osobliwości miast i dziwy podróży* [= Curiosities of the Cities and Wonders of a Travel], transl. Tadeusz Majda and Halina Natorf, 1962);
- Al-Fārābī, *Al-madīna l-faḍīla. Kitāb as-siyāsa l-madaniyya* (*Państwo doskonałe* [= An Ideal State], transl. Józef Bielawski, 1967);
- ʿUsāma Ibn Munqid, *Kitāb al-iʿtibār* (*Księga pouczających przykładów* [= A Volume of Enlightening Examples], transl. Józef Bielawski, 1975) – this is an especially interesting book for the Europeans, as it contains observations of a Muslim way of the life, their dress code and the behavior of the European knights during the Crusades;
- Ibn Ḥazm, *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma fī-l-ʿulfa wa-l-ʿullāf* (*Naszyjnik gołębiczy* [= The Necklace of a Dove], transl. Janusz Danecki, 1976);
- Al-Hamaḍānī, *Maqāmāt* (*Opowieści lotrzykowskie* [= Picaresque Stories], transl. Janusz Danecki, 1983);
- *Riḥlat Makāriyūs* (*Ukraina w połowie XVII w. w relacji arabskiego podróżnika Pawła syna Makarego z Aleppo* [= The Ukraine of the Middle of the 17th century as Seen by Paul, son of Macarios, of Aleppo], transl. Maria Kowalska, 1986);
- Ibn ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-ʾisrāʾ ilā -l-maqām al-ʾasrā* (*Księga o podróży nocnej do najbardziej szlachetnego miejsca* [= A Book of a Night Journey to the Noblest Place], transl. Jolanta Wronecka, 1990);
- Al-Ġazālī, *Miškāt al-ʾanwār* (*Nisza światła* [= A Niche of Lights], transl. Jolanta Wronecka, 1990);

- Abū Zayd as-Sīrāfi (China and India), Buzurg Ibn Šahriyār (= The Indian Ocean) – texts of the travelers of the 10th c.: *Wspaniały Świat Oceanu Indyjskiego* [= The Magnificent World of the Indian Ocean], transl. Andrzej Zaborski, 1998.

Polish translators have also been fascinated by the old Arab poetry, though its translation is prohibitively difficult. So far the fascination has yielded a divan of poetry of Kaʿab Ibn Zuhayr, a famous poet of the first century of Islam, translated and edited by Tadeusz Kowalski in 1950. In 1981 Janusz Danecki and Aleksandra Witkowska translated seven pre-Islamic qasidas (*Muʿallaqāt*). However, I believe that Danecki's greatest achievement is the translation and scholarly edition of a selection of Arabic poetry of the 6th–13th centuries, where apart from the poets of the Jahiliyyah there are famous authors of the times of the Umayyads and the Abbasids. The translations are excellent, which can be appreciated especially by those who know both Arabic and Polish. The book was published in 1997 and since then has been an exceptionally helpful study aid for the students of Arabic philology.¹⁴

Few Polish authors of critical works related to the classic Arabic poetry and poets include in their own translations of entire poems or their comprehensive fragments.¹⁵ Among the most outstanding modern experts on Arabic poetry and its translators there is Paweł Siwiec, a professor of the Jagiellonian University. The translations contained in his three books: *Rytm staroarabskiej kasydy* [= The Rythm of the Old Arabian Qasida] 2005, *Zarys poetyki klasycznego wiersza arabskiego* [= An Outline of the Poetics of the Classical Arabic Poem] 2008 and *Abū al-ʿAtāhiya – poeta, blazen, asceta* [= Abū al-ʿAtāhiya – a Poet, a Jester and an Ascetic] 2012, demonstrate the author's unique commitment to making the rhyme and rhythm of the Polish poem similar to that of the Arabic one.

As far as the Polish translators are concerned their primary interest is modern Arabic literature. Here is a list of the most important literary works in Polish, translated from original Arabic texts:¹⁶

- Yūsuf Idrīs (Egypt), *Qāʿ al-madīna* (*Egipski erotyk* [= Egyptian Erotic Story], transl. Janusz Danecki, 1980);
- Ṭaha Ḥusayn (Egypt), *Al-ʿAyyām* (*Księga dni* [= The Book of the Days], transl. Józef Bielawski, 1982);
- Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (Egypt), *ʿAwdat ar-rūḥ* (*Dom niespełnionych marzeń* [= The House of Unfulfilled Dreams], transl. Janusz Danecki, 1982);

¹⁴ Danecki, Janusz (ed.) 1997. *Poezja arabska. Wiek VI–XIII. Wybór* [Arabic Poetry of the 6th–13th c. A Selection.] Transl. Józef Bielawski, Janusz Danecki, Marek M. Dziekan, Tadeusz Kowalski, Jolanta Kozłowska, Antoni Lange, Adam Mickiewicz, Aleksandra Witkowska, Barbara Wrona. Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków II/239.

¹⁵ One can find detailed information on this subject in Turek 2010: 396–418.

¹⁶ One can compare the following review to the list in Dziekan 2008: 300–302.

- Ġassān Kanafānī (Palestyna), *Al-Qiṣaṣ al-qaṣīra* (*Głowa kamiennego lwa* [= The Head of the Stone Lion] – 35 selected stories, transl. Janusz Danecki, 1982);
- Naǧīb Maḥfūz (Egypt), *Zuqāq al-Midaqq* (*Hamida z zaulka Midakk* [= Hamida from the Backstreet Midaqq], transl. Jolanta Kozłowska, 1982 and 2010);
- Ġāda as-Sammān (Syria), *Kawābīs Bayrūt* (*Koszmary Bejrutu* [= Nightmares of Beirut], transl. Hanna Jankowska, 1984);
- Emil Ḥabībī (Palestine), *Al-waqāʿiʿ al-ǧarība fī iḥtifāʾ saʿīd abī n-naḥs al-mutaṣāʾil* (*Niezwykłe okoliczności zniknięcia niejakiego Saida Abu an-Nahsa z rodu Optysymistów* [= The Unusual Circumstances of the Disappearance of the one Said Abu an-Nahsa of the Optimist Family], transl. Hanna Jankowska, 1988);
- Naǧīb Maḥfūz, *Bayna-l-Qaṣrayn* (*Opowieści starego Kairu* [= The Old Cairo Stories], transl. Jolanta Kozłowska, 1989 – the book was published in Poland six months after the author received the Nobel Prize in literature, second edition 2005);
- Naǧīb Maḥfūz, *Qaṣr aš-Šawq* (*Kamal – Opowieści starego Kairu* [= Kamal – the Old Cairo Stories], transl. Jolanta Kozłowska, 2009);
- Yaḥyā aṭ-Ṭāhir ʿAbd ʿAllāh (Egypt), *Aṭ-Ṭawq wa-l-ʿaswira* (*Naszyjnik i bransolety* [= A Necklace and Bracelets], transl. Jolanta Kozłowska, 1999);
- Ḥasan Naṣr (Tunisia), *Dār al-Bāšā* (*Uliczki starego Tunisu* [= Backstreets of the Old Tunis], transl. Jolanta Kozłowska 2001);
- Salwā Bakr (Egypt), *Al-ʿAraba d-ḡahabiyya lā taṣʿadu ʿilā s-samāʾ* (*Złoty rydwan* [= The Golden Chariot], transl. Izabela Szybilska-Fiedorowicz, 2009);
- Salwā an-Nuʿaymī (Syria), *Burhān al-ʿasal* (*Smak miodu* [= Taste of Honey], transl. Marek M. Dziekan, 2009);
- Aṭ-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ (Sudan), *ʿUrs az-Zayn* (*Wesele Zajna* [= The Wedding of Zayn], transl. Jolanta Kozłowska, 2010);
- Aṭ-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ, *Mawsim al-ḥiǧra ʿilā š-šamāl* (*Sezon emigracji na Północ* [= The Season of Migration to the North], transl. Jacek Stępiński, 2010);
- Naǧīb Maḥfūz, *Maḥamat al-ḥarāfiṣ* (*Ród Aszura* [= Ashur Family], transl. Jolanta Kozłowska, George Yacoub, 2011);
- Naǧīb Maḥfūz, *Al-Karnak* (*Karnak* [= Karnak] transl. Jolanta Kozłowska and George Yacoub, 2011);
- Naǧīb Maḥfūz, *Mirāmār* (*Pensjonat Miramar* [= Miramar Pension], transl. Jolanta Kozłowska and George Yacoub, 2012);
- Naǧīb Maḥfūz, *ʿAwlād ḥarati-nā* (*Dzieci naszej dzielnicy* [= The Children of Our Quarter], transl. Izabela Szybilska-Fiedorowicz, 2013);
- Naǧīb Maḥfūz: *Ḥān al-Ḥalīlī* (*Chan al-Chalili*, transl. Jolanta Kozłowska, 2015).

Two collections of stories by Arabic writers, that is *Skorpion* [= Scorpion] of 1970 and *Ziemia smutnej pomarańczy* [= The Land of a Sad Orange] of 1983, selected and edited by Jolanta (Jasińska) Kozłowska. The first collection comprises 28 stories written by the best Egyptian writers, whereas the second contains contemporary stories from various countries – Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan and Yemen. Naturally, also modern poetry is of interest to Polish Arabists, but in comparison with translations of classical poetry, translations of modern poetry are few and far between. The most important are two collections of modern poetry: *Liście oliwek* [= The Olives' Leaves] of 1976, containing the works of Palestine poets, selected and translated by Samir Shoukr and Aleksandra Witkowska and *Pieśni gniewu i miłości* [= Songs of Wrath and Love] of 1983, selected and translated by Krystyna Skarżyńska-Bocheńska, which contains works of modern Arabic poets from various countries – Egypt, Iraq, Libya. Professor Skarżyńska-Bocheńska is especially interested in the works of Adonis – °Alī °Aḥmad Saʿīd, a Syrian poet, as she has written many articles and a monographic study of his works entitled *Adonis – obrazy, myśli, uczucia* [= Adonis – Images, Thoughts, Feelings], 1995.

As I have already mentioned, the interest in Polish literature and, what follows, the number of Polish literature translations, is very much limited in Arabic countries. Polish literary output, just like the literary output of other Slavic countries with the exception of Russia, is almost completely unknown there. The major problem is the language barrier, as still there are very few people knowing Polish and Arabic equally well. Only in those countries where translations from Polish were published in other foreign languages, an Arabic translator could attempt their further translation into Arabic. For instance, this was true about the translation of Adam Mickiewicz's *Księgi Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* [= The Books of the Polish Pilgrimage], which was published in Lebanon in 1946 on the basis of a French translation. It was also a French translation that was used by Yūsuf Asʿad Dāḥir as a basis for his rendering in Arabic of *Anhelli*, the poem which the great Polish romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki had written a hundred years earlier in the monastery of Saint Anthony in Ghazir. Selected fragments of the translations were published in a Lebanese journal *Al-Anwār* of October 4th, 2000, which described the celebrations of the hundred fiftieth anniversary of the poet's death and which was organized by the Polish embassy in Lebanon and a Lebanese literary magazine *Al-ʿUḍsiyya*. At the end of the 90s, as an element of the celebrations of the two hundredth anniversary of Adam Mickiewicz's birth, it was suggested that *The Invocation* (*Ibtihāl*) from his famous epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*, could be translated. The challenge was met by dr. Munīr Anīs °Aṭāllāh, who knew Polish very well and could translate the original from Polish. His translation has been published in the

work of Zbigniew W. Wolkowski in 2002.¹⁷ In 2004 the Lebanese poet Mōrris ‘Awwad translated the *The Invocation* into Lebanese Arabic on the basis of the French translation of Robert Bourgeois. All of this I was told by dr. Arkadiusz Płonka, who has collaborated with the two poets mentioned above and who is my collaborator and colleague from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Jagiellonian University.

As it is clear now, translations of classical Polish literature into Arabic hardly exist and those which do are difficult to obtain. Modern literature has fared much better. There have already been published three books in Arabic countries, which present the life and work of the three most important modern Polish poets, the two of whom were awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. The books were brought out in 1998, 2001 and 2002 respectively, all by the *Al-Madā* publishing house, with branch offices in Damascus, Beirut and Nicosia of Cyprus. The author of the books, including both the selection and translations, is dr. Hātif al-Ġanābī, a poet and a faculty member of Warsaw University. The book *Mādā yahduṭ li-n-nuġūm* (1998) is devoted to Tadeusz Różewicz (1921–2014), *Madīḥ at-tā’ir* (2001) to Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004) – Nobel Prize in literature of 1980, and *An-nihāya wa-l-bidāya wa-qaṣā’id ‘uḥrā* (2002) to Wisława Szymborska (1923–2012) – Nobel Prize in literature of 1996. I also know a translation of the play *Ślub* [= The Wedding] of Witold Gombrowicz (1904–1969), made by George Yacoub in 2004. The latest achievement is a translation of Adam Mickiewicz’s “Sonety krymskie” [= The Crimean Sonnets] prepared by prof. Yousef Sh’hadēh (Yūsuf Šihāda), a writer, poet and a faculty member of the Jagiellonian University (*Sūnītāt al-Qirm li-šā’ir Būlandā al-‘aẓīm ‘Ādam Mītskīfītš*, Casablanca: Kalimate, 2014).

Coming back to the claim I made at the beginning of this paper about the key role of language contacts in mutual international and social contacts, I would like to emphasize a unique role of philologists – scholars and translators, who work at the interface of two, sometimes more, languages and thus have bene intermediaries in the amazing and continuous process. It is not only Polish Arabists who are so much merited for the Arabic-Polish contacts but also a not so numerous group of native speakers of both languages, who make an effort to learn others’ tongues, fundamentally different in respect of their lexis and structure. It is the language which enables them to learn and understand different cultural heritage of their respective communities. It is only people like that who can popularize Polish science, literature and culture in Arabic countries, which in future may at least partly remove the inequalities between mutual interests and influences that this paper surveys and illustrates.

¹⁷ Wolkowski, Zbigniew William. 2002. *A Study in Geopoetics and Identity: the Polyglot Compilation in One Hundred and Nine Languages*, Paris.

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